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INDIAN NOTES AND MONOGRAPHS

VOL. X NO. 5

A SERIES OF PUBLICATIONS RELATING TO THE AMERICAN ABORIGINES

A BIRD-QUILL BELT OF THE SAUK AND FOX INDIANS

BY
M. R. HARRINGTON

NEW YORK
MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN
HEYE FOUNDATION
1920

Publications of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation

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THIS series of INDIAN NOTES AND MONOGRAPHS is devoted primarily to the publication of the results of studies by members of the staff of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, and is uniform with HISPANIC NOTES AND MONOGRAPHS, published by the Hispanic Society of America, with which organization this Museum is in cordial coöperation.

A BIRD-QUILL BELT OF THE SAUK AND FOX INDIANS

BY

M. R. HARRINGTON

BIRD-QUILL BELT OF THE SAUX AND FOX (OBVERSE)

A BIRD-QUILL BELT OF THE SAUK AND FOX INDIANS

By M. R. Harrington

THIS curious old belt of buffalo-hide, with its neat decoration in colored bird-quills, is valuable to the collections of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, not only because it represents the period of Indian art before the introduction of glass beads by the whites, but also because examples of bird-quill decoration of any kind are now rare.

The belt formed part of the contents of a "war-bundle" collected from the Sauk and Fox Indians of Oklahoma, and, because it was considered a powerful amulet and to confer warlike powers on its wearer, it was donned only on the warpath, after the enemy had been sighted, and in the ceremonies connected with the bundle.

While the belt itself and the symbols on it were considered powerful magically, much of the power, according to Indian ideas, resided in the bunch of feathers attached to the back of the belt so as to hang down behind the wearer like a tail. Of these, the skin of a crow gave to the warrior the watchful cunning of that bird, and the hawk-feathers the hawk's power of swift attack, while the red-dyed eagle-down symbolized blood and war. Four little bundles of herbs attached to the bunch had the power, the Indians believed, to turn aside arrows and bullets.

The belt itself is about $1\frac{3}{4}$ inches wide and $29\frac{1}{2}$ inches long; it is made of buffalo-hide, with loops at the ends and skin strings to tie it about the body. The bird-quill decoration completely covers the side supposed to be worn outward, and consists of a background of dark red, divided into two fields by a transverse band of black and white stripes in the middle, and finished at each end with a similar though narrower band of stripes. In the center of each red field there is a black rectangle outlined in

BIRD-QUILL BELT OF THE SAUK AND FOX (REVERSE)

white, and containing a white cruciform figure with a black, rectangular center. On the inner surface of the belt the decoration consists of alternate rectangles of black and yellow buffalo-wool yarn, and the crosses in bird-quills brought through from the front.

Both black and red quills have been colored with native dyes, the white ones left their natural color. Laid side by side transversely of the belt, they are held in place by six parallel lines of sinew stitching which penetrate the belt by means of longitudinal slits made for the purpose and engage the buffalo-wool yarn on the back, which is also laid transversely. The ends of the quills are carefully bent over the edges of the leather and neatly fastened under the yarn, presenting an attractive finish.

The belt and the bundle of which it forms a part have been mentioned in the writer's paper on the "Sacred Bundles of the Sac and Fox Indians,"[1] and the use of bird-quills in decoration by the Eskimo and others in Orchard's book on the subject.[2]

NOTES

1. HARRINGTON, M. R., Sacred Bundles of the Sac and Fox Indians, *Anthr. Publ. University of Pa. Museum*, vol. IV, no. 2, p. 198, Phila., 1914.

2. ORCHARD, W. C., The Technique of Porcupine-Quill Decoration among the North American Indians, *Contributions from the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*, vol. IV, no. 1, New York, 1916.

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